Babe

Ethel Margaret Mckay, also known as Babe; Darling Ethel Mckay; Ethel Margaret Jackson; and later Ethel Eppler, was born in Searchlight, Nevada on January 16, 1920. She married George Truman Eppler in the 1940’s and gave birth to two children, Pamela Jean Eppler and Paula Eppler. Her dad was David Irvin Mackey, a Berea college graduate, who wasn’t the greatest student, failing multiple times and dropping out once. He moved from his home town of Richmond, KY to California in 1910 and married Gladys A. Love. In California he “crossed over” meaning, he would present himself as white and would shave his head and eyebrows off to be accepted into white society to try and gain acceptance and job opportunities. Along with changing his appearance he had to cut all ties with his African American family, “people who crossed over were lost to the African American community,” (“Passing”). Crossing over ended up not being the best decision for his future, because those close to him that found out, stayed away and his family felt betrayed for most, if not all, of their lives.

I can imagine that Babe had a very confusing childhood, her father was perceived as very strange by her mother’s family and later on he was forced out of their home. Her mother remarried and Babe changed her last name to Jackson, taking her step-fathers last name. The question I’d like to think about is if her father’s education, lack of a job, and true ethnicity influenced her in any way? We have seen that through values, certain cultures and people in a higher social class stress the importance of education (Parrillo). Although there is no record of her educational status, a couple scenarios can be formed based on what we do know. She was married in her early twenties, when she was young her mom and dad split up giving her another person who could influence her potential educational attainment. More than likely Ethel was a stay at home mom for many years. The social structure of society itself at the time was very limited in terms of what a woman could do and what was expected from her. “Those who attended college found the formerly high quality comprehensive education replaced by classes that emphasized training for women’s roles in the household,” (Moran) even with the right to
vote established in 1920, the social structure of society just wasn’t in favor of the advancement of women. The question of why there is not much information available about Ethel could be linked to the lack of importance of a woman’s role in society. Not only did her biological dad not provide her with the best example to follow in life, society was against her advancement, and to some extent her documentation.

Another interesting part of Ethel’s life is her ethnicity and what race she would consider herself. Her dad technically has African American roots but because he “crossed over” he continued to consider himself white until the day he died. Based on the information available, Ethel was raised in a predominantly white household and society, but as time progressed and during the 50’s and 60’s during the black power movement she could have grown to embrace her biological dad’s heritage and helped with the movement, “African Americans often allied themselves with progressive whites in the National Urban League, the Congress of Industrial Organizations,” (Whitaker). She could have been accepting of her father and his heritage or, through the socialization process, she could have absorbed some of the hatred from her mother’s side of the family. It is rumored that Gladys’s parents wouldn’t allow David on the property at one point, whether this is because they found out his race or various other reasons we don’t know. Either way, society at the time disfavored African Americans, and as time went on, many people disfavored those who would cross over, “this type of passing was widely condemned by black editorialists and political activists” (“Passing”)

Overall, Ethel’s life can only be viewed from the little we know about her early life and what can be gathered from the historical time period she lived in. As a female, her educational and occupational outcomes weren’t looked at as, as important as the males who dominated society at the time. It’s interesting to consider what her outlook on African Americans would have been and how that affected her relationship with her dad and others in society.
Works Cited


